



Bucolic Borders from the Mediterranean to Central Asia, 2000-2017

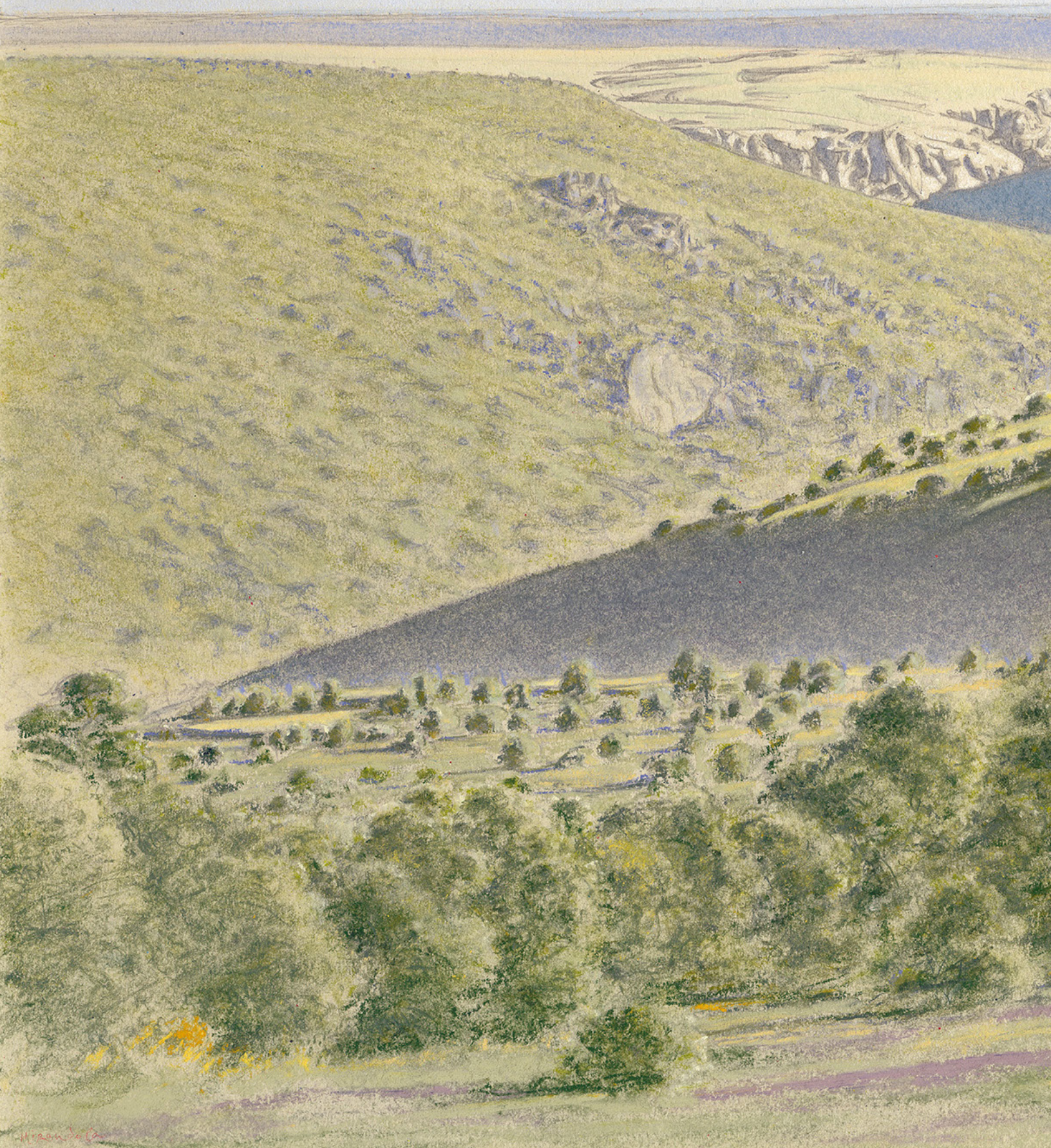
François Cayol *

I have never been in a country without having the desire to go see the other side of its borders. Borders are always stimulating for the imagination and full of promises—they are suggestive of the edge of another world. A world that is sometimes very familiar, and at other times, often for reasons of geopolitics, very distant. Occasionally, this other world is almost inaccessible.

To me, some of the more memorable borders, crossing by train, include for instance going between Turkey and Iran across the mountains of Kurdistan, or more recently, from Tbilisi in Georgia and Baku in Azerbaijan. Less recently, I remember the first time that I crossed the extreme south-east of Morocco at Figuig; the few kilometers of desert that separate the Moroccan and Algerian border posts are forever etched in my memory . . .

* **François Cayol** (b. 1954) spent his teen years in The Netherlands and studied etching in Aix-en-Provence in 1974 and at the Louis Calvaert-Brun Studio (Paris, France) from 1976. He lived months at a time alternatively between The Netherlands, Aix-en-Provence and Paris (France), and Morocco until the 1990s. All those years, he also travelled to Africa, the Middle East, and North America. From 1990, he spent winter months in Mali. In 1992-94, he was a resident at the Spanish Academy Fine Arts, Casa Velazquez in Madrid. Thanks to the non-profit "Pour Que L'Esprit Vive", he was resident-artist at the La Pré Abbey, France (2000-2005). More recently, his journeys included the Caucasus, India, Morocco, Oman Sultana, Provence and Auvergne regions (France), Turkey, Yemen. His first book *Dessins Nomades (Itinerant Drawings)* was published in 2011. A second book "*Dessins Nomades II*" came out in 2019. Today, he is working on a third book. All are available at <https://dessinoriginal.com/fr> and <https://www.francois-cayol.com>.

... Conversely, there are natural borders that are symbols of natural beauty. I have followed with much happiness such borderlands, as the various rivers that separate Spain from Portugal from north to south: Rio Duero, Rio Tajo, or Rio Guadiana. One can cross those rivers at will, passing by old abandoned customs turrets watched only by vultures perched on cliffs. History is everywhere present. From one village to the next, whether Portuguese or Spanish, one finds high-up fortified castles that for centuries were alternatively Moorish or Christian, Spanish or Portuguese ...



The Rio Douro gorges, in Miranda, Parque internacional rio Douro (or Duero), Spain-Portugal border, Portuguese shore. Dry pastel 2015



Miranda, 21.11.2015
26.12.2015

... In Spain as well, Baelo Claudia on the Strait of Gibraltar remains one of my favorite scenes: without ever getting tired I can draw these ruins on the shore within the horizon the Moroccan coast: the Djbel Moussa, the northern cape of Africa at the point of my pencil. On a single sheet of paper, I can bring together two continents!...



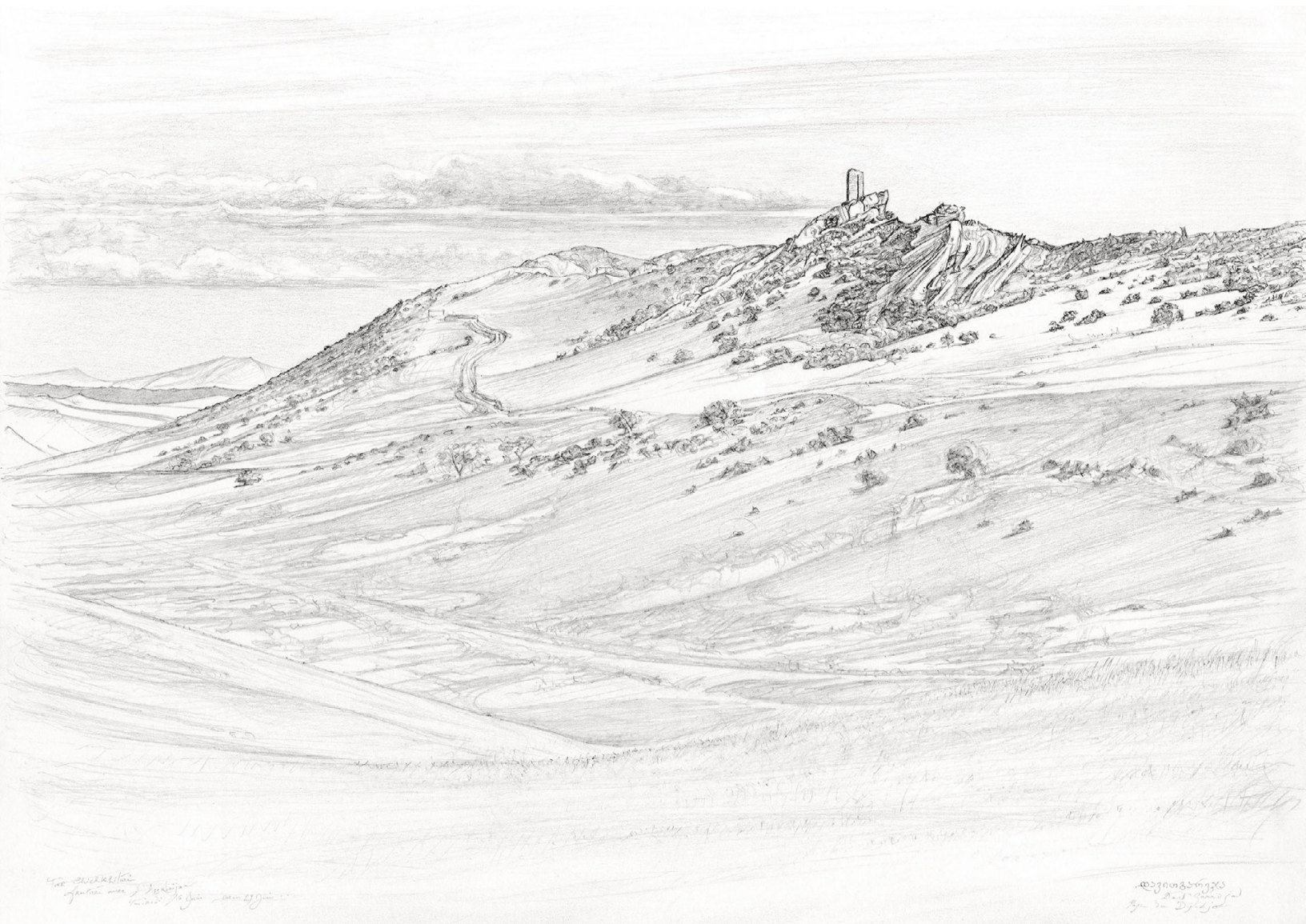
Baelo Claudia, Roman city; the Strait of Gibraltar and the Djbel Moussa, on the coast of Morocco (Africa minor). Pencil drawing 2000.

... A similar feeling of standing on the edge of two worlds inhabited me when I was drawing the Bosphorus in Istanbul. This is such a fabulous border; a magnificent symbol to this day because the two shores belong to the same nation, but remain mythical of two world regions: the Middle East and Europe. On the other end of Turkey, I drew once on the site of Ani, the former capital of the great Armenia, now Turkish territory, while on vacation with my family. At the time, a sign forbade the visitor to turn her/his gaze to the other side of a tiny stream that separates two irreconcilable countries and was once a border between the Western and Soviet worlds. Then, Turkish soldiers, a little indolent and at first suspicious, came to check on what this little silhouette was doing—sitting nearly motionless among the ruins for hours. When they saw, my back turned to the forbidden border, that I was drawing the church of Saint Gregory ruined by time and earthquakes, they sat quiet near me to smoke cigarettes and watch me draw . . .



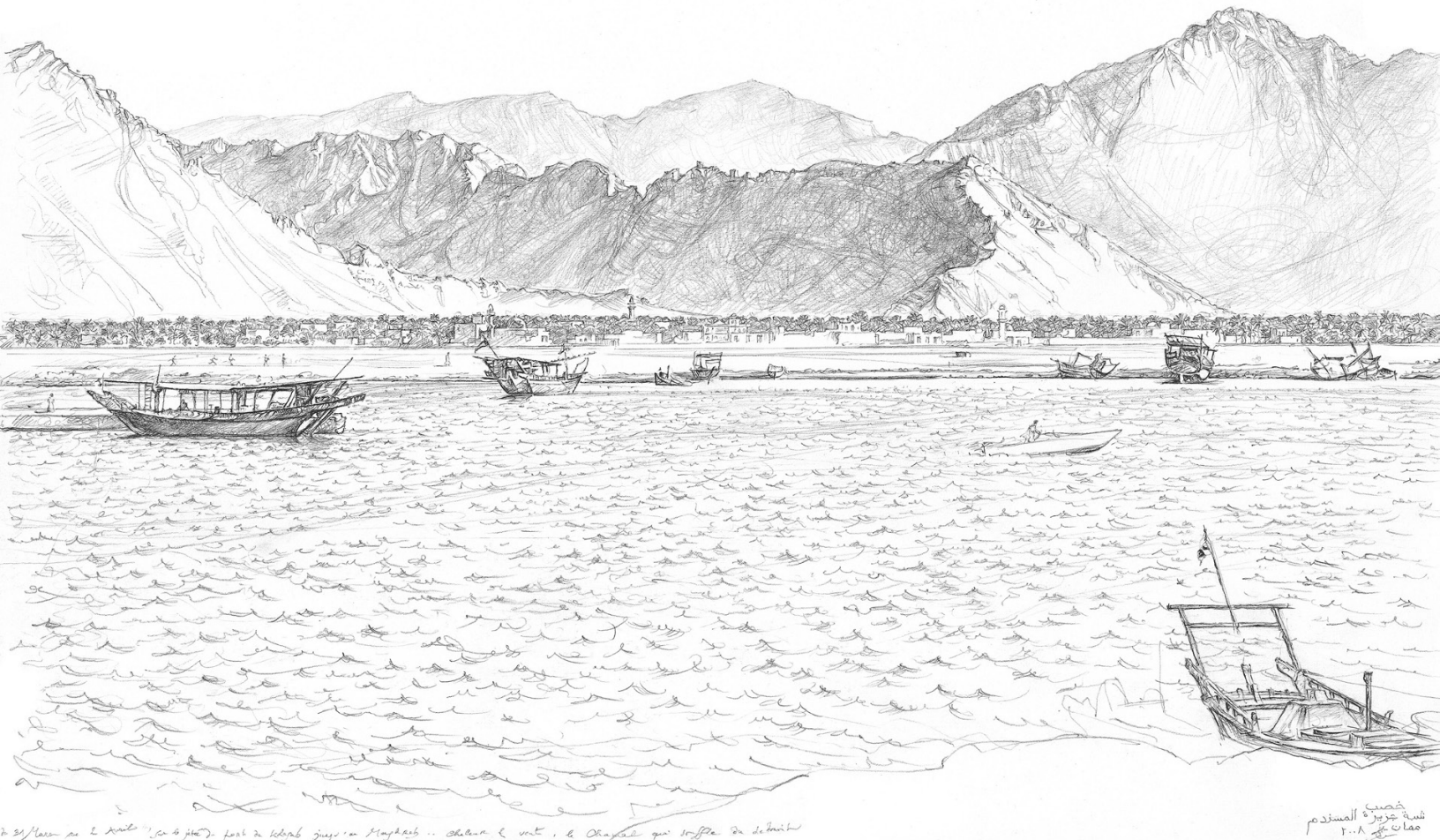
Saint Gregory the Illuminator, Ani, formerly capital of Greater Armenia, now in Turkey, on the Armenian border (ex-Soviet). Drypoint engraving 2002.

... Another time in Georgia, alone, far from any habitation, I was drawing a watchtower perched on a rocky ridge. This was the border with Azerbaijan, very close. I did not know then that I was being watched. I had heard barking in the distance, a little worried, thinking that they were sheepdogs. But soon after, I saw across the steppe two border guards descend at full speed. They approached, faces closed. One of them came to see over my shoulder what I was doing. Suddenly, he understood that I was drawing. I was an artist, or a painter; he showed me by gestures that he understood ... 'ok, ok' he said and raised his thumb, smiling to his colleague. All of us relaxed. But it was clear that I was in a strictly forbidden area, that I was free to finish my drawing on condition that I did not move from where I drew until I was ready to go back to the trail that passed a little further back ...



Watchtower, near David Garejja, in Georgia, on the border with Azerbaijan. Drawing in pencil 2017.

... Another border, strategic because just a few nautical miles from the Strait of Hormuz and the sea channel through which the world's largest oil traffic passes, is a peaceful little seaport of Khasab, an isolated enclave in the mountainous Sultanate of Oman. I drew on the breakwater of the port all day while speedboats left towards Iran trafficking electronic equipment, and large men came to unload flocks of Iranian sheep destined for the rotisseries of the Emirates...



The port of Khasab in Musandam, Strait of Hormuz, enclave of the Sultanate of Oman, between Iran and the UAE. 2006 pencil drawing

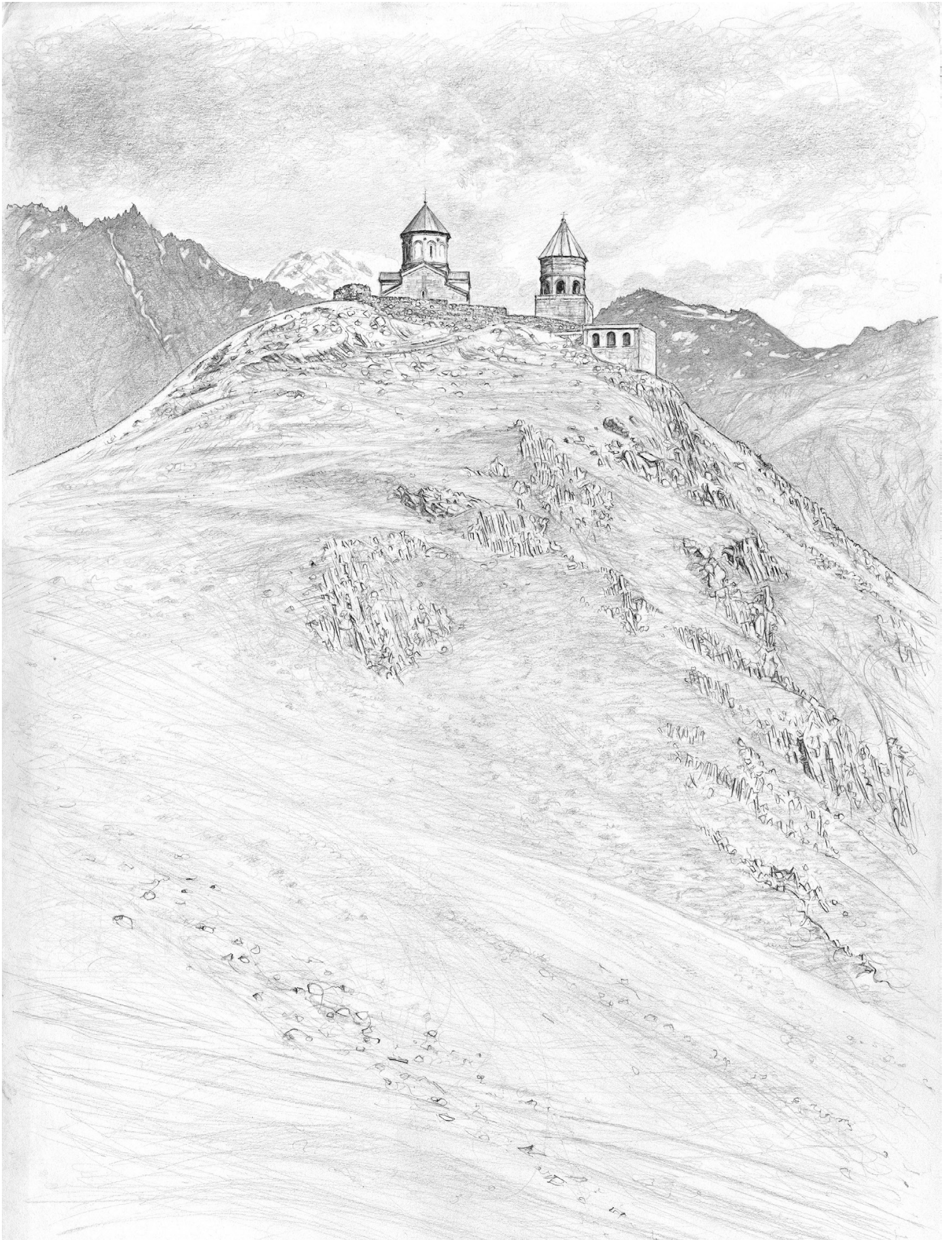
... Once in Algeria, at the Moroccan border, it was more difficult: Surprised by an army patrol who accused me of drawing a military building—when in reality I was drawing a small Acacia with large thorns—I was taken back to the border in a Land Rover and spent the afternoon alone with scrutineers and suspicious custom officers. I was only released in the middle of the night on the express condition that I take a taxi to the first town, Bechar, one hundred kilometers away.

Also, on the Iranian border, in Kurdistan, after inspecting all my luggage, leaving through my notebooks, examining my pastels, and pencils, a custom official concluded that I was not a journalist, and relaxed. He looked at my sketches of coffee shops and asked me to draw him! Thanks to the whistle of the train that was about to leave, I escaped...



The Tess river, in the north of Mongolia, near the Russian border (Siberia and the former republic of Tuva). Pencil drawing 2008.

... I believe that my status as an artist, after arousing mistrust and suspicion from customs officers, soldiers and other uniforms in general, in the end often saves me many more serious troubles, inspiring a form of respect or deferential sympathy.



Guergueti "La Trinité", at the foot of Mount Kazbek. "military road", the first road built between Russia and Georgia, before the Darian parade, Russian-Georgian border. Drawing in pencil 2017.

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გურგუეთის სამეურვე (1871-72) - (სანაღებო ქალაქი და მისი ეკლესია ქალაქის დასავლეთით)

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